

FLORIDA CONFLICT RESOLUTION CONSORTIUM

PROJECT QUALITY ASSESSMENT

August, 2007

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“Not only is the price manageable, but they provide added value such as informal advising and consultation on other matters. They also keep us informed on some relevant developments of which we were unaware.”- FCRC Client

“The sunk costs are enormous because of their in-depth understanding of our agency, Florida politics, and our technical issues. It would take a lot more money and time to get a comparable team up to speed, and then it would be a bet on their ability and sustainability.” FCRC Client

“The better you do, the better you need to become to remain the leader.” – FCRC Client

“To continue, the Consortium must increase, demonstrate, and communicate its competitive advantage. And never forget, Americans love change.” FCRC Client

A hallmark of successful service organizations is their ability to achieve and maintain high quality services and products. A goal of the Florida Conflict Resolution Consortium (FCRC or Consortium), based in the State University System, is to provide and be known for outstanding performance and quality consistent with its statutory mission and purpose.

Since 2003 the Consortium has transitioned from an statewide service organization receiving recurring core funding from the Legislature to a self-sustaining center relying principally on contract funding to carry out its statutory mission. To examine the Consortium’s record in providing quality services during this transition, the FCRC recently commissioned a study to learn how their clients in more than 40 projects viewed the quality of their work. This assessment will be utilized by the Consortium’s staff and Advisory Council to explore how to respond to the lessons learned and how the Consortium can enhance quality performance while responding to growing project opportunities.

Between December 2006 and March 2007, Dr. Stuart Langton, an experienced organization consultant, interviewed managers and leaders representing 24 agencies served by the FCRC during the past 3 years including representatives from federal, state, regional, county and local government, and a few non-profit, organizations. An interview guide with 15 questions was used flexibly to adapt to differences in client experiences and to promote greater in-depth discussion.

The major finding of this study is that, with one exception, those interviewed for this study found the services of the Consortium to be of value to their agencies and of high professional quality. An important measure of service-quality by the FCRC is long-term renewed contracts with several “annuity client” agencies, along with frequent “repeat” clients, as well as “new” clients. Over the past three years, the Consortium has a healthy mix among these three types of clients that reflects satisfaction among previous clients and interest among new ones. Another measure of quality is that almost all clients say they would hire the Consortium again or recommend it to other agencies.

Those interviewed for this study were sophisticated representatives of their agencies or organizations with considerable insight into organizational culture, political dynamics, and relevant policy issues. Accordingly, their level of expectation and demand in regard to FCRC services were and are high. Further, many of the issues the Consortium must address with clients are complex, difficult and contentious. One client observed, “We set the bar high and expect the Consortium to continue to meet it.” This highlights the continuing need to nurture the competency and quality of services provided by the FCRC. By performing well, the Consortium has developed some very strong relationships with clients. This was reinforced in this study and is illustrated in the frequent praise, constructive insights, and thoughtful suggestions from the clients.

The participants in this study also identified 16 best practice approaches and methods used by the Consortium that they thought were particularly effective.

Beyond praise and high regard for the Consortium, clients report some inconsistencies in their experience and have offered some constructive suggestions for improvement including:

- Change the organization’s name to better capture what the Consortium does
- Develop additional facilitation and consultation and technology based methods
- Strengthen and streamline time management and the use of the web to ensure progress in facilitated projects
- Improve the quality of written materials:
- Improve Consortium administrative capacity especially in light of growing demand for services.
- Moderate client control to assure balance and neutrality
- Strengthen service capacity through the inclusion of some new consultants with technical expertise, research ability, and/or facilitating skills that complement those of the staff.
- Spend more time with leaders:
- Provide a tip sheet on working with the Consortium
- Make greater use of visual aides in training programs:

Overall this study should inspire satisfaction and confidence among the staff and supporters of the Consortium. The participants in this study have been generous and helpful in identifying ways in which the Consortium has been effective and can continue to improve.

A promising and challenging finding from this study is that clients anticipate greater demand for the kinds of services provided by the Consortium in existing and new policy areas. These opportunities provide the FCRC with choices and challenges to advance quality while dealing with the potential of much greater quantity. Growth in demand is anticipated on many fronts:

- **The long agenda for addressing growth:** Florida is in the midst of dealing with a multi-decade agenda concerned with environmental and growth issues. The Consortium has experience and is well positioned in providing process assistance services in this area and should anticipate ongoing opportunities.
- **Emerging policy issues:** There are many developing policy issues Florida must face that are intense, complex, and controversial, including, immigration policy and practices, global warming and energy, emergency management, school reform and redistricting, and health care.
- **Stakeholder and public involvement:** Many of those interviewed said that engaging the public and involving stakeholders in decision-making were major trends in their agencies
- **“Grassroot” local and regional challenges:** While Florida has many state-wide issues to address, there are at least as many issues and needs for consensus building that will need to be addressed at regional, county, and local levels.

These raise key organizational and strategic questions related to preserving and advancing quality going forward such as: What should be FCRC position, role, and strategy in an expanding market? What are the implications for the FCRC of expanding or losing market share? Are there FCRC service areas that need to be improved, deleted, or added? What organizational changes will be needed to accommodate growth? The title of the popular book, Good to Great by Jim Collins captures the position of the FCRC. This study is one confirmation that the Consortium is a good organization. The question this raises is: does it have the interest, will, and ability to become a great organization?

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PROJECT QUALITY ASSESSMENT August, 2007

I. INTRODUCTION

A hallmark of successful service organizations is their ability to achieve and maintain high quality services and products. A goal of the Florida Conflict Resolution Consortium (FCRC or Consortium) is to provide and be known for outstanding performance and quality. To this end, the FCRC recently commissioned a study to learn how their clients viewed the quality of their work.

Since 2003 the Consortium has transitioned from an statewide service organization receiving recurring core funding from the Legislature to a self-sustaining center relying principally on contract funding to carry out its statutory mission. To examine the Consortium's record in providing quality services during this transition, the FCRC recently commissioned a study to learn how their clients in more than 40 projects viewed the quality of their work. This assessment will be utilized by the Consortium's staff and Advisory Council to explore how to respond to the lessons learned and how the Consortium can enhance quality performance while responding to growing project opportunities.

Between December 2006 and March 2007, Dr. Stuart Langton, an organization consultant, interviewed managers and leaders representing 24 agencies served by the FCRC during the past 3 years. The group included representatives from federal, state, regional, county and local government, and a few non-profit, organizations (*see Appendix A*). An interview guide with 15 questions was used to ask as many similar questions as possible (*see Appendix B*). Because of differences among these people (who we refer to as "clients," since all but a few are or have been), and differences in times available for interviews, the guide was used flexibly to adapt to differences in client experiences and to promote greater in-depth discussion. The results of these interviews are summarized in 10 sections following this introduction.

The major finding of this study is that, with one exception, those interviewed for this study found the services of the Consortium to be of value to their agencies and of high professional quality. An important measure of service-quality by the FCRC is long-term renewed contracts with several agencies (we refer to them as "annuity clients"), along with frequent "repeat" clients, as well as "new" clients. The Consortium has a healthy mix among these three types of clients that reflects satisfaction among previous clients and interest

among new ones. Another measure of quality is that almost all clients say they would hire the Consortium again or recommend it to other agencies.

There are some areas in which quality is not rated high and improvements are needed. Beyond praise and high regard for the Consortium, clients report some inconsistencies in their experience and have offered some constructive suggestions for improvement. These will be identified and discussed in several sections of this report.

Those interviewed for this study were sophisticated representatives of their agencies (or groups) with considerable insight into organizational culture, political dynamics, and relevant policy issues. Accordingly, their level of expectation and demand in regard to FCRC services were and are high. Further, many of the issues the Consortium must address with clients are complex, difficult and contentious. One client said, “we set the bar high and expect the Consortium to continue to meet it.” This implies continued nurturing of competency and quality by the FCRC. Yet, by performing well, the Consortium has developed some very strong relationships with clients. This was reinforced in this study and is illustrated in the frequent praise, constructive insights, and thoughtful suggestions from the clients that are reported herein.

A promising finding from this study is that clients anticipate greater demand for the kinds of services provided by the Consortium in existing and new policy areas. These opportunities provide the FCRC with choices and challenges to advance quality while dealing with the potential of much greater quantity.

II. CLIENT PERCEPTIONS OF THE CONSORTIUM

This study has attempted to better understand the experiences and views of clients in regard to the FCRC. So, at the outset, clients were asked how they learned about the Consortium, what is its reputation, and what do they understand to be its areas of service? People said that they learned about the Consortium by viewing or participating in a Commission or event it facilitated, by attending a training program, or from a referral by a colleague. Most of them said that the FCRC had a good reputation for impartiality, objectivity, and conscientious performance. “They are widely trusted as a neutral.” Many reinforced this view by noting that the affiliation of the Consortium with Florida State University (FSU) reinforces this perception. A few people mentioned that they are aware of a small minority of state officials or members of their agencies who have negative views of “process” approaches to problem-solving and of the Consortium.

A common view of the Consortium is, “they are known for great facilitation of meetings and commissions.” Many clients said they were not aware of other services they offer. “They are very ‘type cast’ as a brand,” said a client who added: “This might limit other work opportunities.” Several clients reported that beyond facilitating meetings they were helped in identifying alternatives to deal with conflicts in their agency. “I don’t know if they do consulting alone without a meeting contract, but it would be helpful to some agencies.” A number of clients said they knew about training offerings, but one said, “I am not sure how regularly they are offered.”

A. CLIENT DECISION MAKING

Those interviewed for this study were asked who decides to use the services of the FCRC and under what conditions? Despite variations among agencies, one or more of four factors seem to be at work. The first factor is that the agency faces a difficult and contentious issue, often one they have not been able to resolve. These issues may be large and long in duration, such as the Everglades restoration, or more short term such as boat regulations in manatee safety zones. The intensity of stakeholder differences usually begs for the use of an independent outside resource such as the Consortium. Second, there is often a “champion” in an agency who believes in consensus and inclusive processes and wants outside help to manage them. Often these people have participated in FCRC training or in a facilitated activity. Some are promoted over time and are in positions to advance administrative democracy to their agencies. Consequently, they involve the Consortium in activities to support a more participatory culture in their agency. Third, a particular manager is assigned the responsibility of finding a consultant/facilitator to help the organization address an issue. As a rule, this assignment calls for consultation and collaboration with others in the agency, other agencies, or stakeholder leaders in selecting consultants and in designing a program. Often this leads to the recommendation of involving the FCRC.

It was pointed out by several clients that some recent Florida governors such as Bob Graham and Lawton Chiles were strong consensus builders who established a climate that encouraged the kinds of approaches the Consortium helps to provide. It was observed that recently elected Governor Charles Crist seems to be in this tradition. It was suggested that the FCRC make efforts to build a strong relationship with his administration.

B. THE NEGOTIATION AND CONTRACT EXPERIENCE OF CLIENTS

There is strong agreement and disagreement among clients about the ease of developing contracts with the Consortium. Most report that the association of the FCRC with FSU provides a significant competitive advantage since government agencies can contract with them without competitive bidding. “Being in Tallahassee and doing no-bid contracts is very attractive to us because we can talk face to face and do not have to go through a cumbersome, bureaucratic, and time-consuming process,” said a state agency client.

On the other hand, a handful of clients report that having to work with the FSU contract office is a “hassle.” “That office is horrible,” said one person. Another person added: “You cannot find a person or, if you can, the same person, with whom to negotiate.” A source of dissatisfaction for some clients is the overhead rate that FSU often seeks to impose. “They wanted 25% overhead and that is too much for us and local agencies throughout the state,” commented one local government client. “This really hurts the Consortium, and it is a terrible rip-off of agencies.” One client reported negotiating an ongoing and renewable agreement with the FCRC with a lower overhead rate with FSU. “If we had not done this we would have gone elsewhere.” Another person said, our agency has worked with a lot of universities for a long time and we have not had that many problems with FSU and worked out a reasonable overhead rate.”

It was reported that FCRC staff are very helpful in developing and managing contract negotiations. “We worked with the Director and he was a great listener, very fair, and

transparent,” said one client. Another added that, “they have gone above and beyond to keep the costs down.” Several people said they liked the approach the Consortium uses of developing a concept and then negotiating several iterations of a contract proposal with their agency. “The negotiating process takes time and was sort of a test drive for us. We liked that they were not pushy and were able to demonstrate their responsiveness to our needs.”

There were two criticisms of staff in negotiating contracts. One client was “perturbed” by pressure by one staff member to increase the amount the agency could afford, (although the staff person apologized immediately when confronted about this.) Another said that they experienced difficulty in getting proposals delivered in a timely manner. One person stated: “The Consortium does good work, but they have weak administration in managing contracts and in dealing with detail matters.”

C. SATISFACTION AND IMPACT

The FCRC provides a variety of services primarily to government agencies throughout Florida. It specializes in helping to design and facilitate Commissions, Task Forces, and Work Groups that have a discrete assignment and deadline. Also, they help to design and facilitate public meetings, retreats, training programs, seminars, conferences, and work shops. To a lesser extent the Consortium provides consultation or provides research for clients, but these activities are most often are a part of a larger effort to help a group or groups develop consensus in regard to an important policy issue.

The sample of those selected to be reviewed for this study was constructed so as to provide a client mix that included the many services of the Consortium. Further, client representatives were included from local, county, regional, state, and federal levels.

While there were differences in the agencies, roles of those interviewed, and services received, a significant finding from this study is the high level of satisfaction with Consortium services among them. In fact, all but one person indicated they were satisfied with the services of the Consortium and would hire them again. Further, their assessments were quite enthusiastic as is reflected in the following things said among them about the Consortium: “Indispensable...I cannot tell you how beneficial this was for our Commissioners...everyone raved and gave it a glowing review...I can’t imagine a better process or facilitator...very well received by our board...great job facilitating the meeting...good group and excellent job...excellent workshops and we got good feedback from all over the state...the evaluations were all high...our staff were very pleased and gave it high marks...worthwhile and of good value...very satisfied...they were terrific...the Consortium has done a lot of good work for our agency...a bang-up job.”

These strong positive comments should not imply that the Consortium is always successful. As one person observed, ‘the very nature of the tough issues they take on means that they cannot always reduce or resolve conflicts.’ Another said: “They cannot always get consensus in groups, but it is not for lack of trying.” An agency manager noted: “We have put them in some very tough situations, they usually do good, but occasional the nut is just too tough to crack.”

Several people reported that there are some people who do not like the consensus approach used so by the Consortium. “We have a number of managers in our agency who do not like the emphasis on process and think it takes too much time.” The only person interviewed for this study that was not satisfied with the service of the Consortium made the comment: “Their approach is too process-oriented and not sufficiently outcome-oriented. They need to be adapt their model to deal with the time constraints of senior executives.”

Among the many clients who expressed satisfaction with the Consortium, a number went further in expressing a deeper level of appreciation, “for the values and practices it encourages.” One person said, “our agency consider them to be a partner in improving the culture of our organization.” Another person, who had worked with the Consortium for many years suggested: “Their impact on government in Florida may be greater than we imagine when you consider how many agencies and public officials they have worked with over the years.”

III. BEST PRACTICES:

The participants in this study were asked to identify approaches and methods used by the Consortium that they thought were particularly effective. The most effective things, most of which concern commissions and facilitated groups or events, are as follows:

1. Facilitated groups have to have a good chair, facilitator, and manager of the process, “who has technical expertise as well as good administrative skills.” One person suggested that, “the synergy between the three is very important. They need to work closely as a team.”
2. Clarifying the process and ground-rules at the beginning of each project, and reviewing them from time to time, is very helpful to participants. “This helps to create realistic expectations and provides ‘rules of the road’ for people with different backgrounds.”
3. Consultants and facilitators need to be “quick studies” and become knowledgeable about substantive issues under consideration. A client advises: “This is critical in establishing confidence and respect, plus it is key in figuring out how to deal with different issues and options.”
4. Deciding who should participate in activities, if it is possible to do so, may be as important as the process. Being careful to identify all the stakeholder groups that need to be involved is a critical first step. “Also, it is important to get the most thoughtful, fair, and influential among stakeholders, and you need to avoid strident and overbearing types,” suggests one person. Another said, “if you do not have the right mix after you start, or if you lose some one, go out and add others, but be sure to give them a good orientation on the issues and process.”
5. A well organized “manager” from a sponsoring agency can be invaluable in being responsible for logistics and communications for meetings and events. Facilitators should provide clear directions as to the help they require and communicate in a timely and thorough manner.
6. In developing a design for a project, consultants need to understand the organizational culture of the host agency and participating agencies. They also need to understand the politics, policy options, and stakeholder views. “He (the facilitator) was as good in understanding the politics of the issue as he was in

grasping technical nuances and figuring the best process to keep us on track,” one client reported.

7. In high conflict situations, it can be helpful to make clear that success in terms of complete consensus may not be achieved because issues may be too difficult and divisive. “It helped when the consultant said what we should seek is as much progress as possible. This made us relax and not get flustered by our disagreements. We ended up agreeing on all but two of over 70 issues.”
8. There is always tension among some participants about the time it takes to build consensus. Some are more impatient than others, and, facilitators can sometimes be too passive or too controlling in moving a group along. Yet, creating thoughtfulness and a level of trust to resolve issues takes time. “It cannot be rushed,” comments a client, “in the short term it may not be efficient, but in the long view it may be more so when you consider the cost of failure.” Another person advises, you need to reach the ‘tipping point,’ as long as it takes – then, nail the agreement.”
9. Establishing a deadline is helpful in keeping a group on track. “There were some in our group who would talk forever, but being reminded of the deadline created more discipline.”
10. The super-majority consensus rule is very helpful in establishing resolutions that last. One person reported: “This was a key to our commission’s success. If we had just a simple majority we would have walked away but the disagreements would rise again. With the super-majority, even though it takes more time, you end up with decisions that may not all be to your or others liking, but these are agreements you all can live with.”
11. Achieving early resolution on one or several issues energizes a group and gives it confidence in the process. “When we saw how this worked, our trust in the approach and each other grew – it reinforced how we should proceed.”
12. Accurate and detailed meeting notes help by documenting progress, reinforcing consensus, and updating people on issues. “The notes helped us a lot, especially if we got them a week prior to our next meeting, for anyone who missed a meeting, and for new members.”
13. Meeting evaluations are good tools. They help the facilitators keep track of group attitudes, interests, and needs. One person said that “when he (facilitator) reviewed the evaluations with us, we decided together we needed a retreat to have time to better understand each other and have time to resolve some matters that were in the way of everything else. After that event we really took off as a team.”
14. Several of those interviewed who had chaired or managed commissions said that they found the annotated agenda notes prepared by the consultant to be very useful. One said, “at the time I was very busy, but the notes helped me to zero in on important things, and to remember some things I could have forgotten.”
15. A well written and attractive final report reinforces a group’s work and makes members feel good about their effort. Additionally, as a client observed, “a good report maximizes the potential impact and influence of a group’s effort on others.”
16. Several people noted how effective the Consortium had been in having a person take notes on a computer that was projected onto a screen for all to see. “We

were really impressed when we came back the second day of our retreat and they distributed an edited printed copy for us to review.”

IV. QUALITY SERVICE PERFORMANCE

A. WILL CLIENTS HIRE THE CONSORTIUM AGAIN?

The answer to this question is an unequivocal yes, but there is more to the story than this. Beyond perceiving that the Consortium provides quality services, many say that they are attractive because their services are priced reasonably. One person added, “not only is the price manageable, but they provide added value such as informal advising and consultation on other matters. They also keep us informed on some relevant developments of which we were unaware.” A long time client goes further: “The sunk costs are enormous because of their in-depth understanding of our agency, Florida politics, and our technical issues. It would take a lot more money and time to get a comparable team up to speed, and then it would be a bet on their ability and sustainability.”

All of the above should not lead the Consortium to assume it has a lock on long term clients. As one person reported, “despite continued good work, there are some in our agency, for whatever reasons, who are uncomfortable that the Consortium keeps getting contracts.” Another said that, “the better you do, the better you need to become to remain the leader.” These comments were not expressions of dissatisfactions but rather reflected the context of contracting. “To continue,” advised one client, “the Consortium must increase, demonstrate, and communicate its competitive advantage. And never forget, Americans love change.”

A number of additional points were made regarding future rehire potential. One was that the cost threshold among smaller and rural agencies for Consortium services is lower than state and federal agencies. A small client said, “I think their fees are reasonable, but to us they are expensive, so we expect a lot.” Second, one person warned that the Consortium may increasingly be competing with regional planning agencies in providing services to local government. He suggested that, “the Consortium is good at partnering with others, and this may be a good strategy in the years ahead with regional agencies.” Lastly, one person proposed that, “the Consortium might strengthen their role as trainers and design consultants to others who do similar work. As a state agency they can’t hog the growing market, but they can play many roles within it.”

B. STAFF PERFORMANCE

There was a wide variety of experience in working with FCRC staff among those interviewed for this study. A few had dealt with only one staff, some with a few, and many with most or all. Those in the latter category noted considerable difference in attributes and abilities among staff. “The talent is not uniform,” said one. Another stated that, “they are very different, but the worst is good and the best is great.” A few said that style, attitude, or lack of ability of one or a few staff meant that they did not want to involve them in projects.

On the other hand, most clients are very enthusiastic about the staff. “We would hire them again in a heartbeat,” said one. Among the large annuity clients who provide the

largest amount of work, appreciation is particularly strong for one or several staff as the following comments indicate: “He is one of the best facilitators I have seen,” “he has done a terrific job for us as has his partner,” and, “he was good to begin with and has grown even better over the years.”

When asked to identify what qualities among staff they found most helpful, the clients identified the following in their words: good content familiarity; very easy person to work with; established good rapport with our staff; can see the bigger picture; he always keeps the group engaged; they offer insights and clear alternatives; he leads when necessary but engages everyone in dialogue; reflects a positive attitude; perceptive on political issues; and, he takes time to interact with us all.

Nearly half of those interviewed said they could think of no ways in which staff could have been more effective. “They were first class, terrific, period,” was a typical response. Among those who did answer this question, most responded by identifying one or more attributes that were not helpful. These included the following in their words: sometimes he talks too much; he made things too ‘facilitator-focused;’ he did not seem to trust the group; he totally missed some key points; his newsprint notes made no sense; he never gets anything in on time; he is too passive; he was a good consultant but poor trainer, he was a good trainer but not a good facilitator, and, he was too controlling.

Several clients proceeded to discuss staff qualities in more detail and made several interesting points. One point was that some staff are better at some of the following tasks than are others: planning, designing events, negotiating, proposal writing, consulting, facilitating, training, teaching, interviewing, managing, and doing research. “Each has a different skill set.” One client went further and observed that each staff has a different style as well as different skill set and, “some fit better with different kinds of clients than do others.” Along this vein one person said, “it is his (facilitator) style to push us and keep us on track – he is a kind of ‘power facilitator.’ Some folks might not like this, but it fits perfectly with the background of those in our group.”

In pursuing discussion about staff performance, a number of clients commented that staff worked together as a team, suggesting that staff composition is important. “They worked well together,” observed one person, “one ran the show and the other said very little, but, when he would summarize, it was perfect – no bull, short, concise and right on target.” One client closed our discussion on this matter by saying, “when we contract with the Consortium, which we have often, we want to be sure to get the right people to do the right things.”

C. WRITTEN PRODUCTS

The most frequent written products the FCRC provides to clients during projects are proposals, training materials, background materials, minutes of meetings, progress reports and final reports. In regard to the quality of this material, clients differ considerably in their assessment.

A majority of those interviewed said that the materials they received were perfectly adequate. A typical comment was: “They were fine, maybe a little too much sometime, but they were

helpful.” Several who expressed satisfaction did mention that particular staff members submitted materials late. Then again, several others praised staff for punctuality and thoroughness, e.g., “very complete, on-time, and more than we expected.”

A third of those interviewed were not pleased with the quality of materials. Some were not happy with a number of written products and evaluated overall quality using the following terms: below expectations, poor readability and not acceptable, not well focused, bad grammar and spelling, not proof-read, and they don’t use spell-check.

Some other clients were more specific in their criticisms. One client was unhappy with a consultant’s meeting minutes and said that “often his newsprint summaries of our discussion did not capture what was intended and the minutes missed much of what we said and meant.” Several people spoke specifically about poor reports: “It was unacceptable”, said one, and another reported, “it was plain, drab and poorly written and we had to spend a lot of time rewriting it for our commissioners.” And several people felt they received too much material, “paper over-kill.”

D. SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF SERVICES

At the close of each interview clients were asked: could you offer any suggestions as to how the Consortium could improve the quality of their services? Half answered no, they thought quality was fine or said they had made suggestions in what they had said earlier. Among the rest of the clients, they made the following suggestions:

1. Change the name: “The Florida Conflict Resolution Consortium is a mouthful and is not a good title for marketing purposes,” said one person. Someone else commented, “I don’t think the title captures all of what they do.” No replacement names were suggested.
2. Develop additional methods: Several people who had known of the Consortium for a long time acknowledged that their approaches to working with groups were well known and successful; yet, one former client said, “they need to use more different and new methods so as not to be viewed as a one-trick pony.” Another suggested that, “the use of dots and stick ups are good, but they should make more use of smaller groups and technology to speed things up.”
3. Strengthen time management: Several people expressed concern about the amount of time that facilitated sessions often take. It was suggested that the staff do more to reduce digressive discussion and to not let some people become so dominant. “No one should be allowed to suck the air out of the room,” said one person. It was also suggested that some new strategies should be tested such as having one or two people develop alternatives between meetings on issues to be discussed and to be able to discuss them on a web-site prior to the meeting.
4. Improve the quality of written materials: A number of people suggested that the FCRC use more and better graphics in their materials. One person offered, “they need an in-house editor and they should never distribute anything, even an evaluation form, without client review.”

5. Improve administrative capacity: Several persons suggested that the Consortium could improve quality if they increased administrative staff. “They love to do the work but not the paper work,” said a client adding that “an experienced manager and some editing talent could help a lot.”
6. Moderate client control: This issue came from a client who was concerned that some agencies with which the FCRC works may try to stack commissions or committees with people known to support their positions. “The Consortium should assure an adequate balance among stakeholders,” he said. “When done right this signals the process has integrity, and it assures much stronger and workable agreements.”
7. Include some new consultants: A strong admirer and long-time client of the Consortium observed that the longer his agency contracted with the FCRC, questions would be raised as to why, if they were still the best, and if they were better than alternatives. This point led to the suggestion, “that the Consortium should continue to seek to strengthen their capacity by including some new consultants, from time to time, with technical expertise, research ability, and/or facilitating skills that complement those of the staff.
8. Spend time with leaders: One person observed that some facilitators are too remote from the groups they facilitate. “I’m not sure if this is purposeful or shyness,” but then continued: “If you look at their best facilitator, he is always talking with leaders within the group at the beginning and close of meetings, over lunch and during breaks.”
9. It was suggested that members notice this and feel that the facilitator is confident, more engaged, and connected with people with the most knowledge and influence within the group.
10. Provide a tip sheet: A recent client reported that she had no idea what to expect in working with the Consortium. “I was told they could help us,” she said, “but I had no idea what that might entail.” She suggested that, “it would be very helpful to have a clear one page description of what the Consortium does, how to develop a contract with them, and what to expect in making it work.”
11. Make greater use of visual aides: This suggestion was made by two people in relation to training programs. “The training was O.K. but a little slow. It could have been more appealing with more use of good visual material,” suggested one person. Another pointed out that equipment brought to a meeting did not function and the consultant knew little about using it. “Maybe they need a little AV training.”

V. GROWTH IN DEMAND FOR COLLABORATIVE SERVICES

The consensus among those interviewed for this study was that demands for the kinds of services, and related services, provided by the FCRC will increase substantially going forward. Growth in demand is anticipated on many fronts:

1. The long agenda: Florida is in the midst of dealing with a multi-decade agenda concerned with environmental and growth issues. “Environmental restoration, growth management, and transportation are big-time and lasting issues that will be around for a long time,” suggests one person. The Consortium has experience and is well positioned in providing process assistance services in this area and should anticipate ongoing opportunities.
2. Emerging Issues: There are many developing policy issues Florida must face that are intense, complex, and controversial. These include such things as port security, immigration policy and practices, global warming, emergency management, school reform and redistricting, and health care. “The holdover issues for Florida are huge,” said one person, “but they pale in comparison to the issues that are coming down the pike.” All of which reinforces the potential growing market for FCRC services.
3. Stakeholder and Public Involvement: Many of those interviewed said that engaging the public and involving stakeholders in decision-making were major trends in their agencies. As one official commented: “We are being transformed into a stakeholder agency and we need help in figuring out how to do this well.” Another said that, “we and other agencies have been mediocre in informing and involving the public, but the pressure will be on us to do this more and better. We welcome help from the Consortium or any helpful source.”
4. Grassroot Challenges: While Florida has many state-wide issues to address, there are at least as many issues that will need to be addressed at regional, county, and local levels, “Because the Consortium is in Tallahassee,” observes a client, “they have gravitate to state work, but the consensus-building needs among counties and localities is enormous and can only increase.” Further, many state agencies with regional offices report increasing turnover with staff and predict, “ongoing need for good training services.”

The estimates summarized above, along with the levels of client satisfaction and willingness to use and recommend Consortium services, bode well for the future. A caution, as one long-term client advised is, “that everything is contingent upon the budget from year to year and the approval of management.” These things notwithstanding, the potential forecast is bullish and that does raise some questions for the Consortium: What should be its position, role, and strategy in an expanding market? What are the implications of expanding or losing market share? Are there service areas that need to be improved, deleted, or added? What organizational changes will be needed to accommodate growth?

VI. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The overall news from this study should be pleasing and inspire satisfaction and confidence among the staff and supporters of the Consortium. The participants in this study have been generous and helpful in identifying ways in which the Consortium has been effective and can continue to improve. This points to a next step in which staff and the FCRC Advisory Council will need to review and decide what actions they believe are appropriate, if any, to preserve and advance quality. No recommendations will be made about such actions here;

however, as a prelude for exploring options for action, it might be helpful to think about four things.

- QUESTIONS: A study like this raises many obvious questions; however, that which is obvious may not always be that important or essential to the future of an organization. As Peter Drucker, the prolific management theorist once suggested: “There is nothing so useless, if not dangerous, then the right answers to the wrong questions.” So, the question about questions is: which are the most critical to answer?
- QUALITY: W. Edwards Deming, the “quality” guru who helped Japan boost its productivity and quality from poor to excellent after World War II, advised: “Improve every process.” One of his key principles was to, “search continuously for problems in order to improve every activity.” What would it mean if the Consortium were to act on this principle?
- DISCIPLINE: The title of the popular book, Good to Great by Jim Collins captures the position of the FCRC. This study is one confirmation that the Consortium is a good organization. The question this raises is: does it have the interest, will, and ability to become a great organization? Collins proposes that a great organization needs to create a “culture of discipline”. While this phrase may conjure up images of rigid early 20th century Taylorism (the time and motion study guys), it is more an admonition to run a tighter ship. This is not simple to achieve in organizations that are highly accommodative and allow considerable autonomy. But can the Consortium increase quality and position itself for the future without addressing this issue?
- INNOVATION: While the Consortium is a good organization, the lesson should not be forgotten that even good organizations can fail. This is a phenomenon that Clayton Christensen of the Harvard Business School has examined in his work on innovation. His key thesis is that new companies decline or fail because competitors offer new “disruptive” technologies or innovations that may be less costly (and usually not as good but “good enough”) for existing clients and to others who could not afford what the company had to offer in the first place. So, competitors are able to rip clients from the company while also creating a whole new client base with the disruptive product or innovation. Is it possible that there may be some emerging “disruptive” innovations in methods or in technology, such as consensus building software, that could become disruptive to the Consortium?

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Appendices

- A. List of Clients, Organizations Interviewed
- B. Interview Questions